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Family Factors and Retention: Second Annual In Process Review

Research Triangle Institute

for

Contracting Officer's Representative
D. Bruce Bell

Personnel Utilization Technical Area
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May 1990



United States Army
Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences

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FAMILY FACTORS AND RETENTION: SECOND ANNUAL IN PROCESS REVIEW

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FAMILY FACTORS AND RETENTION: SECOND ANNUAL IN PROCESS REVIEW
Research Hypotheses

General

The key exogenous variable sets in the model are member characteristics (e.g., MOS, training, and education); spouse characteristics (e.g., training, education, employment status, occupational level, and number of children); environmental stress factors (e.g., PCS moves, separation, and location characteristics); and family services (e.g., child care services and spouse employment assistance). The last two sets of exogenous variables are policy variables that the Army can manipulate. The Army also needs to be able to objectively identify families at high risk for leaving so that it can tailor programs for them.

These exogenous variables factors interact with one another to influence a series of endogenous variables starting with work-family conflicts and proceeding through family adaptation, member job satisfaction, member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction), spouse satisfaction with military (family satisfaction), and ending in member commitment and retention behavior. Other endogenous variables include member and spouse perception of Army commitment towards the family and member perceived civilian employment opportunities. The effects of the exogenous variables are mediated by these endogenous variables. The next to the last endogenous variable in the sequence, member commitment to the Army, will mediate most of the total effects of prior endogenous variables such as job and satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction). Commitment will mediate more of the total effects of the exogenous variables than of the total effects of the endogenous variables. Many of the hypotheses presented below involve interactions so that, consequently, the statistical models must contain the required interaction parameters. The parameter estimates of the retention model will vary by stages in the career and family life cycle. The model, after further elaboration, should be amenable to estimation by LISREL.

Member and Spouse Characteristics

Member "quality" and spouse "quality" will be key exogenous variables in the model. They will interact with MOS characteristics and Army environmental press to influence retention behavior.

Higher "quality" members are more likely to leave than lower "quality" members if there are work-family conflicts leading to either member or spouse dissatisfaction. Members, regardless of "quality," who have a "high quality" spouse are more likely to leave if there are work-family conflicts leading to either member or spouse dissatisfaction.

Initial goals for enlisting are significant predictors of retention. Those who join with the notion that "its a good place to start" or are enlisting solely for educational benefits are less likely to reenlist regardless of subsequent job and family satisfaction. Estimating a separate model for this group would result in small parameter estimates for the key linkages among constructs.

Member and spouse characteristics interact with Army family services and environmental stressors to influence both family adaptation directly and retention indirectly through spouse satisfaction with military, member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction), and member commitment.

Environmental Stressors

Environmental stressors such as PCS moves, separations, and desirability of locations will interact with member and spouse characteristics to reduce family adaptation and consequently reduced satisfaction, commitment, and eventually retention. Army sponsored family services can both directly lead to better family adaptation and reduce the negative effect of environmental presses on family adaptation.

Spouse's satisfaction with the military is negatively influenced by environmental stresses induced by extent of PCS moves and separation, and type of location. Spouse satisfaction with the military directly influences member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction). Member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction) influences retention both directly and indirectly through member commitment to the Army.

Army environmental stressors will have more of an impact on first term retention than retention in subsequent terms. The longer one has been in the Army, the more readily one adapts to Army induced stressors.

The external environment characterized with respect to off-post job, recreational, and educational opportunities, will play a significant role in retention due to its influence on wife satisfaction with the military.

Work Family Conflict and Adaptation

Work-family conflict will be greatest in families where member's MOS is demanding, spouse is jointly working and caring for children, and the family is subjected to numerous PCS moves, separations, and undesirable locations. Increased work-family conflict leads to a reduction in family adaptation, subsequent reduction in satisfaction and commitment, and ultimately, a reduction in retention.

Member and Spouse Satisfaction

Member's job satisfaction has a positive direct effect on retention. It also has an indirect on retention though its positive effect on commitment to the Army. The direct and indirect effects of member job satisfaction on retention is moderated by spouse satisfaction with the military. Member job satisfaction is more predictive of retention for higher levels of spouse satisfaction than for lower levels. Spouse satisfaction with the military also has an indirect effect on member retention through its effects on member satisfaction with the military (perceived family satisfaction).

The impact of member job satisfaction, member satisfaction with the military (perceived family satisfaction), and spouse satisfaction with the military on retention, both directly and indirectly through member's commitment to the Army, is moderated by the education, training, and occupational status of both the member and the spouse. For example, "higher quality" members relative to "lower quality" members have more employment opportunities in the civilian sector if they are dissatisfied with either their job or the military environment.

The impact of spouse satisfaction with the military (family satisfaction) on retention, operating indirectly through member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction) and member's commitment to the Army, is conditioned by the spouse's education, training, employment status, and current occupational level. Also, member

characteristics such as sex role attitude and commitment to family will moderate this relationship. For example, the greater the spouse's earning capacity, the greater the spouse's influence on member's retention.

Spouse satisfaction with the military (family satisfaction) has a direct effect on member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction). Moreover, spouse satisfaction level moderates the strength of the relationship between member satisfaction with military (perceived satisfaction) and both commitment and retention. Most of the spouse influence on member retention is mediated by the member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction).

Member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction) becomes a stronger predictor of member commitment and retention relative to job satisfaction in the latter career stages. However, overall, job satisfaction, family satisfaction, and commitment have less of an impact on retention later in the career cycle rather than earlier in the career cycle. At the latter stages of the career cycle, member's retention is driven more by retirement concerns than current job and family satisfaction. In other words, the parameter of the model become smaller as enlistment term increases.

Member Commitment

Member job satisfaction and member satisfaction with military (perceived family satisfaction) are the strongest predictors of member commitment. Thus, they have a strong indirect effect on retention through member commitment. They both also have a significant direct effect on retention. Member commitment to the Army is the single best predictor of member retention. Member commitment also mediates a substantial proportion of the total effects of prior endogenous variables (e.g., member and spouse satisfaction) and prior exogenous variables (e.g., member characteristics, spouse characteristics, and Army environmental stressors) on retention.

Member and Spouse Perceptions

The impact of member satisfaction with the military (perceived family satisfaction) on both member organizational commitment and retention is a function of the member's perceived probability of finding a better job in the civilian sector. The relationships will be strong for those who have high perceived probabilities and weak for those with low perceived probabilities.

Perception of pay adequacy, and civilian job availability will be more important than actual pay and actual job opportunities in predicting retention. Perceptions of family service availability and quality will be more important than actual availability and quality in the prediction of retention. Members who perceive a commitment on the part of the Army for improving the quality of family life will be more committed to the Army and, thus, more likely to reenlist than members who perceive a lack of commitment on the Army's part. Perceptions do not necessarily have to correspond with family services received or satisfaction with received services.

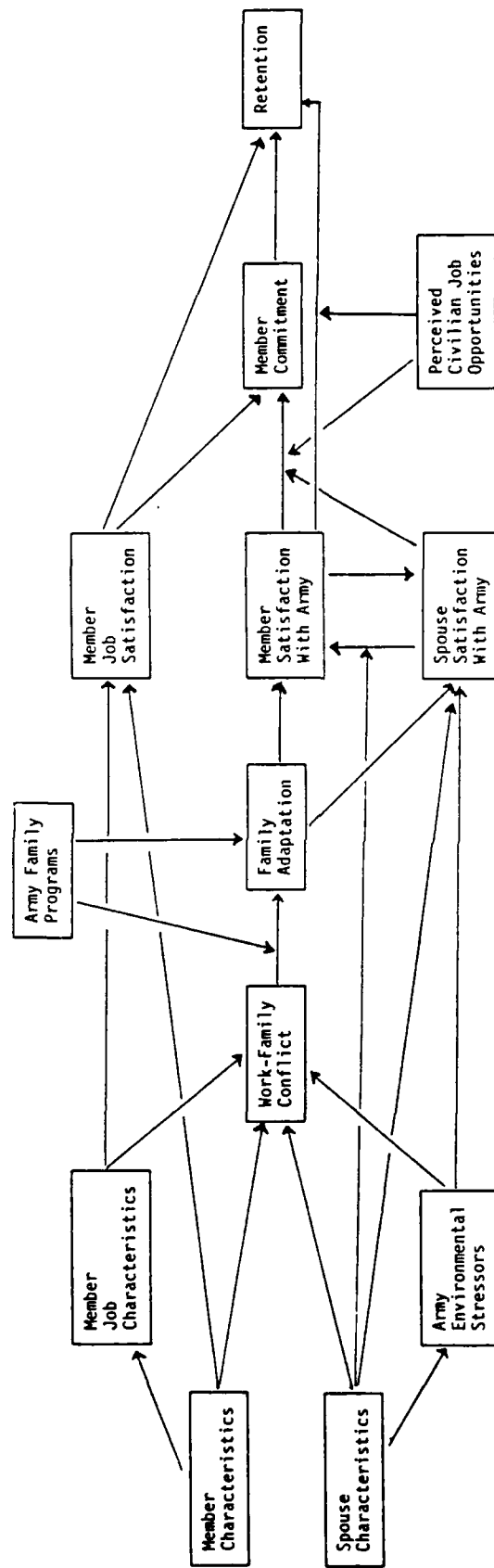


Figure 1. Family Factors and Retention Empirical Model

Retention Decisionmaking Core Extension Project

Objectives

1. To determine the nature and extent of spouse participation in and influence on the retention decision;
2. To identify the types of information used by soldiers and spouses in the retention decisionmaking process;
3. To determine sources of information and other influences on the retention decision and the patterns by which these factors are combined by couples to reach their decision;
4. To identify the time period over which the decisionmaking process occurs and events that are likely to exert significant influence on the process throughout this time period.

Exploratory Research

The exploratory and pretest activities planned for the week of May 16 at Ft. Bragg are designed to serve the following two purposes:

1. To develop initial conceptions of the characteristics of the retention decisionmaking process of married couples in the enlisted ranks;
2. To explore the types of research products needed and user audience for our Core Extension Project research products.

As explained in the AFRP Research Plan, the Decisionmaking Core Extension Project is planned in order to provide information about the decisionmaking process that cannot be obtained from the Core questionnaire. The Core instruments will provide much information about the structural features of the retention decision, but only limited information about process. That is, the Core will tell us what decisions are made, under what conditions, what factors affect the decision and the relative magnitude of their effects. Since survey methodology is limited in the depth with which it can address particular topics and because little definitive knowledge is available about the characteristics of the decision process, a separate research effort is needed, one that is distinct from the Core yet targeted to a subset of the Core sample in order to capitalize on the relevant data available from the Core.

We define process as "how" decisions are made--the dynamic properties of decisionmaking that encompasses the steps, procedures, strategies, activities, decision rules, heuristics and timing involved in the transformation of affect and information into a decision (Abelson & Levy, 1985). Process goes beyond structure to tap the underlying cognitive and interpersonal features of decisionmaking; it specifies the steps between the inputs to a decision and the decision itself.

Couple Decisionmaking. While there is a multitude of studies that have produced models which can predict decisions at the individual level reasonably well, there are few studies that attempt a detailed characterization of the decisionmaking process, even fewer that address the couple decisionmaking process, and fewer still that address the "nonrational" aspect of couple decisionmaking. There are several theoretical approaches to the issue from the literature on family dynamics, power and influence, counseling, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and negotiation and bargaining. We are incorporating several of the more promising approaches in our May 16-19 Ft. Bragg activities. Further, Rakoff and Adelman are extending the individual-rational-cognitive models to include a global affect component and testing the applicability of the expanded model to couple decisionmaking.

Following are the theoretical approaches planned for testing at Ft. Bragg:

Rakoff-Adelman (cognitive-social psychological-rational)

Janis & Mann	conflict theory
Fishbein & Ajzen	normative-attitudinal-affective components

Etheridge-Holley (couple dynamics-nonrational)

Falbo	couple decisionmaking, power, influence tactics
Cronwell & Olson	
Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz	
Scanzoni	
Mitchell & Beach	image theory
Sloan	auras/projected personal futures

The above rational-nonrational classification is somewhat artificial in that it is more suggestive of the relative emphases of the two streams of research rather than a definitive categorization. For example, Rakoff and Adelman are exploring the "nonrational" notions of pre- and post-decisional stress as drivers of information search behavior, and the "nonrational" image theory approach includes a rational as well as a nonrational component.

Administrator Interviews

In addition to the couple decisionmaking exploratory activities, interviews will be conducted with company commanders, senior and reenlistment NCOs and family program administrators to determine:

1. What research products those concerned with retention might find useful;

2. What the training curricula, especially for reenlistment NCOs, need to address.

Etheridge and Holley are pursuing the organizational literature, specifically Brockner and Staw's work on commitment, status quo maintenance, entrapment and sunk costs as possible approaches to designing interventions that company commanders, and reenlistment and senior NCOs can use to bolster a reenlistment decision once it has been made.

Both George Levinger and Terry Mitchell have assured us that we have covered the relevant literature, and further, that there is very little research that attempts to uncover the complex, dynamic quality of decisionmaking. We are breaking new ground and must accept the task of investing in sufficient exploratory and pretest activity to enable us to design a valid, cost-effective research strategy that will deliver useful Army products.

Schedule

Staff will draw upon the existing literature and the Ft. Bragg exploratory findings to develop a research design for the Decisionmaking Core Extension Project. A draft will be submitted to ARI for review and comment by July 31, 1988. ARI comments will be incorporated and resubmitted to ARI for approval by September 30, 1988.

During the third project year, two pretest activities are planned. If feasible, these activities will be conducted with troops provided by TMP. In the event that TMP cannot provide troops, a formal troop support request has been submitted for April-May 1989 and July-August 1989. Data collection for the research effort is proposed to begin early in project year 4.

FAMILY FACTORS AND RETENTION OF ENLISTED PERSONNEL
TR 7 (Formerly TR9)

OBJECTIVES

- Help inform instrument development for Core survey
- Provide partial test of retention conceptual model
- Provide initial look with comprehensive data base of those who remain and those who leave the Army
- Understand relationship of Reenlistment intentions and Behavior and effects of family factors on relationship

REPORT OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION
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 - 1.2 Objectives of Report
 - 1.3 Organization of Report
2. BACKGROUND AND APPROACH
 - 2.1 Background
 - 2.2 Theoretical Framework
 - 2.3 Data Source
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 - 3.1 Retention Behavioral Outcomes
 - 3.2 Career Cycle
 - 3.3 Family Composition
 - 3.4 Definition and Selection of Outcome Groups
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 - 4.1 Family Composition at Entry, Time of Survey, and Present
 - 4.2 Transitions in Family Composition
 - 4.3 Family Composition and Retention
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 - 7.1 Conceptual Model and Analytical approach
 - 7.2 Variable Definitions
 - 7.3 Explaining Spouse and Member Satisfaction
 - 7.4 Explaining Spouse and Member Commitment
 - 7.5 Explaining Member Intentions
 - 7.6 Explaining Member Retention
 - 7.7 Summary
8. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

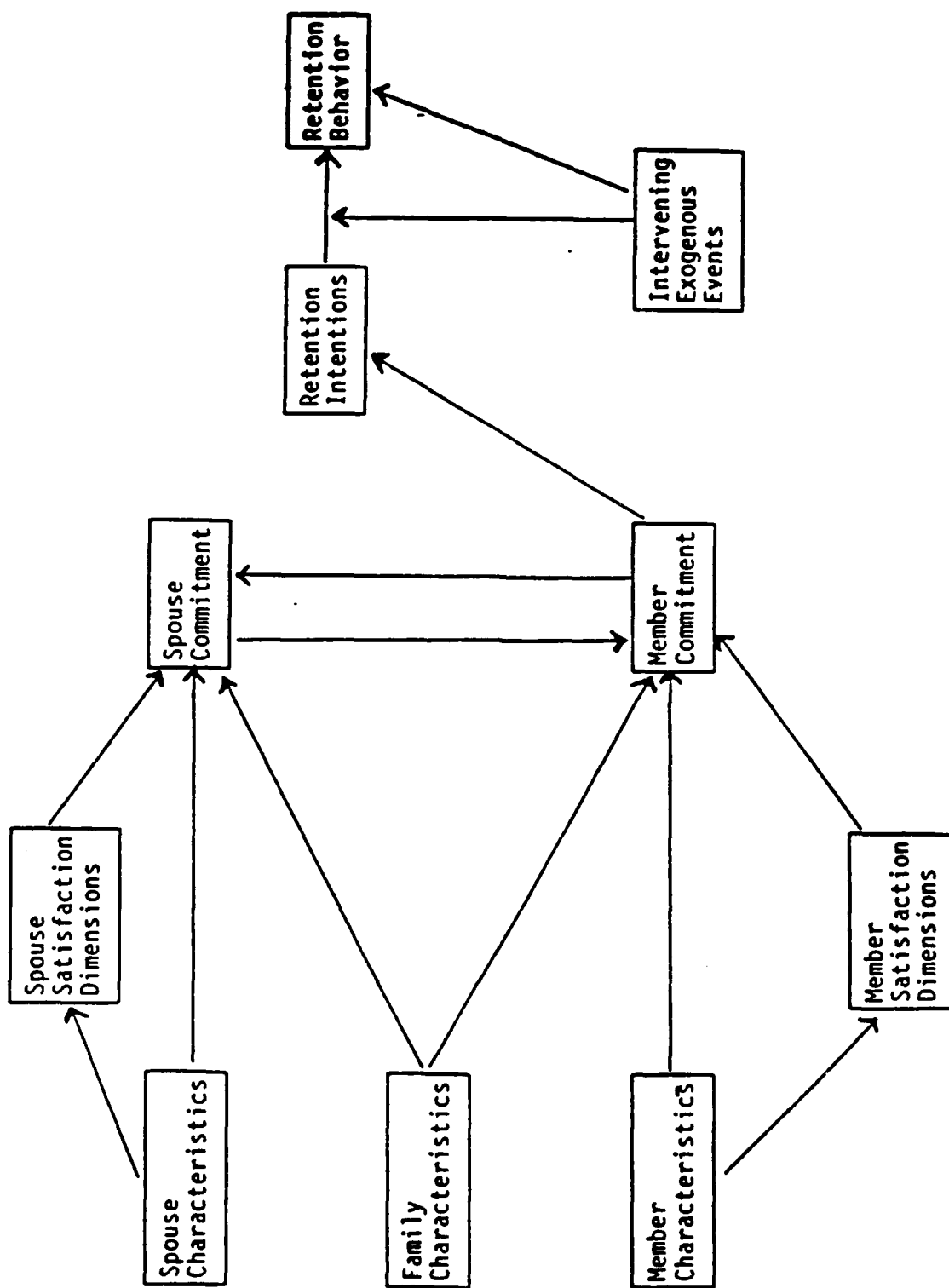


Figure 2. Retention Model for DOD Survey Data

TARP

OBJECTIVES

- Examine general perceptions of the image and role of the USAR;
- Examine reservists' vision of commitment to the USAR;
- Examine perceptions of the USAR experience;
- Examine unfulfilled expectations of reservists; and
- Examine reasons for joining and leaving the TPU.

BACKGROUND

In response to the increasing attrition rate of U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) enlisted personnel during their first TPU enlistment, the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (ODCSPER) has initiated a two-year, 16-project initiative to study USAR attrition. A particularly important element of this strategy is a research project to survey a sample of TPU attritees directly regarding their USAR experiences, reasons for leaving, and general perceptions of the USAR image and role. This project is being carried out as a cooperative effort between seven Army agencies - ODCSPER; Office of the Chief, Army Reserve (OCAR); U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM); U.S. Army Soldier Support Center -- National Capitol Region (SSC-NCR); U.S. Army Reserve Personnel Center (ARPERCEN); U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC); and the U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI) - with ARI designated as the lead agency.

METHODOLOGY

A sample of approximately 15,000 first enlistment Individual Ready Reservists (IRR) in pay grades E1-E6 with unsatisfactory TPU attendance have been selected from ARPERCEN personnel files to serve as potential respondents. Questionnaire items for the survey instrument were developed in consultation with ODCSPER, OCAR, FORSCOM, ARPERCEN and SSC-NCR representatives to ensure that the resulting data satisfy the information needs of users and sponsoring agencies. The questionnaire is designed for self administration by individuals when they make their required visit to a recruiting center during their birth month.

Data is being collected in two stages over a five-month period. Stage I involves a direct mailout to potential respondents with instructions to return completed forms directly to the proponent agency. In Stage II, potential respondents who have not as yet completed the survey are asked to do so when they report to their local recruiting station.

Data analyses will consist of cross-tabulations of questionnaire items by key variables, as defined by ODCSPER, OCAR, and FORSCOM representatives. The desired key variables will be discussed at a May 12, 1988 meeting with representatives of FORSCOM, SSC-NCR, and ARI. The cross-tabulations will be included in a final report that will summarize the problem, describe the research methodology and present main findings.

STATUS

Project operations began in early July 1987; data collection was initiated in December and will terminate on May 15, 1988; and project completion is expected by August 31, 1988. As of May 3, 1988, 2312 completed returns were received.

SCHEDULE

End data collection	May 15
Data tape to RTI	Jun 13
Analyses completed	Jul 15
Draft report	Aug 15
Data tape/codebook	Aug 31

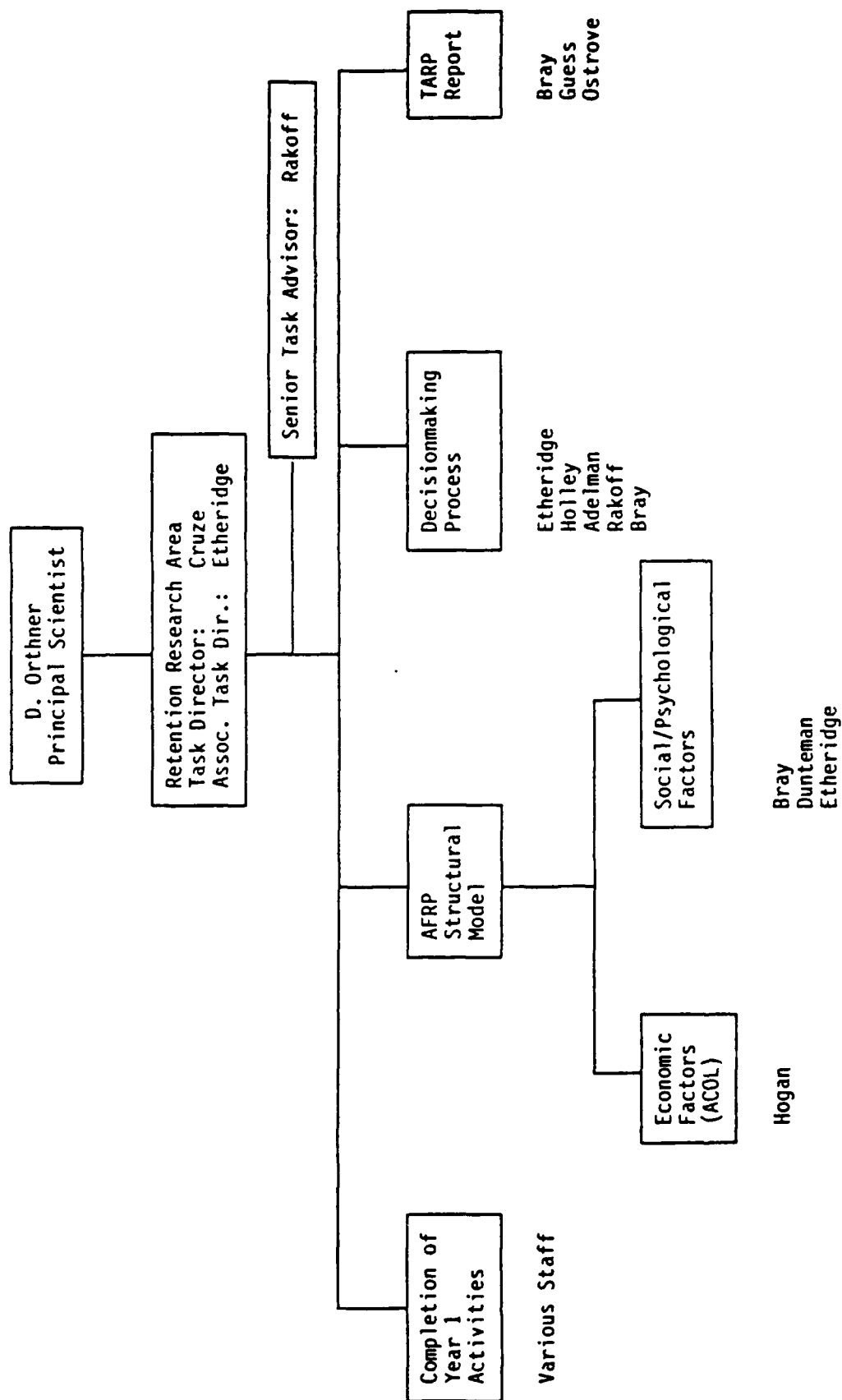


Figure 3. Retention Research Area Organization and Responsibilities